



## Stylistics and Rhetoric: Modern Approaches to Textual Analysis

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### Abstract

Language has witnessed numerous studies that have delved into its form and content. When examining the term "stylistics," it becomes evident that it has explored the nuances of eloquence, aesthetic refinement, and artistic complexities based on perspectives and criteria that render the text a cohesive and dynamic entity, where each part complements the function of the other. However, these studies and theories have not remained confined to a single framework; rather, they have evolved to align with the nature of modern analytical linguistic schools. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate the essence of stylistics and its relationship with the concepts of classical rhetoric and modern structuralism.

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Foundations, Rhetoric, Structuralism, Stylistics.

### 1. Introduction

Stylistics serves as an analytical tool for addressing a range of issues centered around literary genres, whether in terms of form or content. It functions as a methodology that examines and interprets texts through their linguistic features and stylistic choices at various levels—grammatical, morphological, phonological, and semantic. It also explores the functions, meanings, and implications embedded within texts. As a systematic critical approach, its primary objective is to analyze texts within their linguistic contexts, focusing on their impact on readers. Thus, style becomes the subject of study, offering fertile ground for theoretical and applied stylistic analysis. This article aims to highlight the interplay between stylistics, authenticity, and foundations, examining its relationship with rhetoric and structuralism. The findings presented in the conclusion emphasize the significance of stylistics as a methodology aligned with modern studies.

### 2. The Concept of Style and Stylistics

#### 2.1. The Concept of Style: Linguistic and Terminological Perspectives

**2.1.1. Linguistic Perspective:** To discuss the notion of style, it is essential to provide a linguistic definition. Linguistically, the term derives from the root word (salaba), meaning “to take away” or “to seize.” The verb (istalaba) refers to the act of snatching or seizing (Manzūr, 2000, p. 224). Additionally, the term (uslūb) in Arabic denotes a row of palm trees or a specific path or direction one follows. In another usage, style refers to an art form or technique, as in the phrase (akhadha fulān fī asālīb al-qawl), meaning “he employed various styles of expression” (Manzūr, 2000, p. 224). Similarly, most Arabic dictionaries define it as a path or method (Durayd, 1987, p. 215). Classical Arab scholars regarded style as a distinctive approach to composition and a defining characteristic that differentiates one form of expression from another.

### **2.1.2. Terminological Perspective**

Style, in its technical sense, represents the refined outcome of systematic and methodical experiences within the practical framework of its creator. It enables the author to employ language in alignment with the demands of the text and the subjective and objective motivations shaping it.

Based on this foundation, style is viewed as a reflection of the writer’s personality—expressing thought, emotion, perception, and sensitivity. It reinforces the individual's ability to conceptualize and artistically construct any literary work, embedding it with aesthetic and linguistic appeal. It has been defined as: “*the method through which an individual innovatively expresses feelings and emotions through writing*” (Thuwaini, 2006, p. 21).

From this perspective, the ability to handle language effectively and articulate thoughts and emotions with precision constitutes a style. It is a mode of expression that varies from one individual to another.

In essence, style represents the most effective artistic means of conveying meaning within literary texts. Consequently, it has been described as comprising phonological, morphological, rhythmic, syntactic, and semantic structures that influence all levels of analysis and interpretation. These structures form the foundational framework of literary production, as situated within the act of reading and reception.

Al-Masadi (1982) emphasizes this notion by stating: “*Meanings alone embody the essence of style; style is nothing more than the structure and rhythm we impose upon our ideas*” (p. 65).

Thus, style involves deliberate selection and prioritization by the writer of specific linguistic features to articulate a particular stance. This selective process reflects the writer’s preference for certain stylistic features over others, shaping the unique characteristics of their literary output.

## **3. The Concept of Stylistics: Linguistic and Terminological Perspectives**

### **3.1. Linguistic Perspective:**

The term *stylistics* is derived from two components: the root word *style* and the suffix *-ics*, forming a discipline concerned with analyzing the linguistic techniques

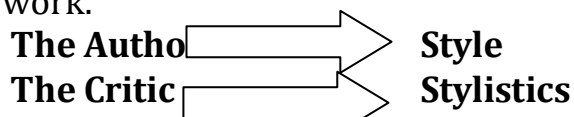
employed to express the intended meaning within a literary text. This analysis often extends beyond the text to engage with broader social and human dimensions.

Accordingly, stylistics is fundamentally defined as *“the search for objective foundations to establish the science of style”* (Al-Masadi, 1982, p. 34).

Etymologically, the word *style* originates from the Latin term *stylus*, which refers to a pointed instrument made of metal, formerly used for writing. It later came to signify *a method of speaking*.

The term has further historical roots in classical Greek rhetoric, where style was regarded as one of the primary tools for persuading audiences. It was classified under the art of rhetoric, particularly focusing on the selection of words appropriate to context and purpose (Al-‘Adous, 2007, p. 35).

Thus, *stylistics*—as the science of style—represents the systematic approach adopted by critics to study and analyze the distinctive stylistic features of a writer’s work.



The author relies on style, while the critic relies on stylistics to uncover the author’s style. Style exerts a compelling force on the reader’s sensitivity by highlighting certain elements within the sequence of speech, drawing the reader’s attention to them. If these elements are overlooked, the text may appear distorted; however, when analyzed, they reveal distinctive meanings. This distinction allows us to assert that style expresses, while stylistics highlights.

### **3.2. Terminological Perspective**

Most researchers in the field of stylistics affirm that it is a literary critical approach that integrates various artistic genres, focusing on the study of language at its core. It primarily draws upon modern linguistic studies, which began to emerge in the 19th century. Ibrahim Abdel Jawad states:

*“The true impetus for the emergence of stylistics lies in the advancements in linguistic studies. Most Arabic studies concur that the rise of stylistics is closely linked to this development and consider it the foundation of stylistic studies. If we acknowledge that stylistics emerged as a product of advancements in the three fields of criticism, rhetoric, and linguistics, we affirm that the origins of stylistics are linguistic, particularly in relation to developments in literary studies.”* (Al-Jawad, 1996, p. 21).

Stylistics, therefore, is a linguistic critical method that analyzes and studies the aesthetic structures and patterns within literary texts. In this regard, Arie Fey notes:

*“Stylistics is the description of the literary text according to methods derived from linguistics.”* (Al-Masadi, 1982, p. 48).

Stylistics gained clarity and structure in modern studies, particularly with Ferdinand de Saussure (1875–1913), who explored texts through the relationship

between the signifier (*le signifiant*) and the signified (*le signifié*), emphasizing the arbitrary nature of their connection within linguistic systems.

Meanwhile, other modernists, such as Charles Bally, perceive stylistics as a means of expressing the soul's features, emotions, sentiments, and repressed feelings associated with the external environment of the self that produces the textual discourse. He states:

*"Many stylistic studies consider stylistics as an attribute that can be ascribed to any text based on its fixed and variable features."* (Al-Kawaz, 2005, p. 9).

The fixed features pertain to linguistic and structural elements, whereas the variable features relate to the subject matter and the writer's personal and real-life circumstances.

Furthermore, Jean Dubois classifies stylistics as a branch of linguistics derived from the science of language. This perspective is reinforced by Michel Arrivé, who asserts:

*"Stylistics is the description of literary texts according to methods derived from linguistics."* (Al-Masadi, 1982, p. 48).

This confirms the role of linguistics in shaping the concept of stylistics. Al-Hadi Al-Jatlawi also emphasizes this point, stating:

*"Stylistics focuses on literary production, which is fundamentally a linguistic event."* (Al-Jatlawi, 1922, p. 27).

Stylistics seeks to uncover the aesthetic qualities that distinguish one text from another or one writer from another through language and emotional expressions, whether the style is collective or individual, scientific or literary.

Similarly, for Riffaterre, stylistics is viewed as a linguistic method closely linked to linguistic studies. This connection between stylistics and linguistic research methodologies is emphasized by Mahmoud Ayad, who states:

*"This connection between stylistics and linguistic studies leads us to the fundamental hypothesis of the discipline itself. This hypothesis is based on the premise that a literary text is a linguistic text whose depths cannot be explored without analyzing the linguistic relationships it encompasses. Such analysis enables us to understand the semantic and emotional charge embedded within the text, which influences readers. Ultimately, this implies that as readers and critics, we can only access the value of a literary work through the text itself."* (Al-Adous, 2016, p. 11).

Accordingly, stylistics, or the science of style in general, has emerged as a method that examines and interprets a text through its language and the stylistic choices it presents at various levels. It also highlights the functions, contents, and meanings it conveys. As a systematic critical approach, its primary focus is the text itself, making it a fertile field for both theoretical and practical study, thereby influencing readers.

## **4. Between Rhetoric and Stylistics**

### **4.1. In Arab Tradition**

The branches of modern stylistics are rooted in the ancient rhetorical foundations, with their origins deeply embedded in Arab studies, even though the term itself was not used. Arab scholars have turned to the heart of Arab heritage to reinterpret classical texts in the context of stylistic studies, acknowledging the historical dimension and emphasizing the authenticity of stylistic research in Arab traditions, while also exploring the connection between tradition and modernity. One of the notable examples of the concept of stylistics in ancient Arabic writings can be found in Al-Jahiz's *Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin* (The Eloquence and Clarification). Although Al-Jahiz did not directly use the term "stylistics" as a technical term, he referred to *al-nuzum* (structure) as an indication of style. For him, style was understood as "the correct selection of individual words, based on their clear sound, lexically familiar usage, and the connotative effects that the use of words may have on the reader. It also involves the harmonious arrangement of adjacent words to ensure their coherence and suitability" (Al-Jahiz, 1991, p. 16).

Al-Jahiz considered *al-nuzum* (structure) to involve the correct choice of individual words, relying on their sound, or musical tone, and their use in a way that conveys meaning, leaving an impression on the soul. He also emphasized the proper coordination between words. For Al-Jahiz, *al-nuzum* refers to a specific pattern in expression, a distinctive method of arrangement. He distinguished between the structure of the Quran and other forms of speech and composition, stating: "The differences in perception and the diversity of research can only be recognized by those who know the distinction between poetry and prose, the varied forms of poetry, and the different styles of speech, including the differences between rhetorical figures and letters. Only then can one recognize the unique structure of the Quran compared to other speech" (Al-Jahiz, 1998, p. 144).

Al-Jahiz was the first to introduce the idea of categorizing levels of linguistic performance, suggesting that speech, like people, is divided into categories: "People's speech is in layers, just as people themselves are in layers. There is speech that is refined, coarse, pleasant, beautiful, ugly, awkward, light, or heavy. All of it is Arabic, and all of it is spoken. With all of it, they praise and criticize" (Al-Jahiz, 1998, p. 144). Al-Jahiz was inclined to focus on the origins of speech, its rhythms, types, and modes of delivery, aligning them with style in its overall and detailed expression.

The term *al-usloob* (style) was used once by Abdul Qaher al-Jurjani, who began his discussion in *Dalail al-I'jaz* (The Proofs of Inimitability) by refuting two ancient theories: the theory that the eloquence of speech lies in the words, and the theory that it lies in the meaning. He concluded that the eloquence of speech does not reside solely in the words or meaning, but rather in the combination of both, or rather in the structure of speech, i.e., in the style (Atiq, 2001, p. 202).

Abdul Qaher al-Jurjani, in his discussion of the concept of *al-usloob* (style) and its theorization, sought to define it, encountering the term in the context of imitation. In his book *Dalail al-I'jaz* (The Proofs of Inimitability), he states: "Know that

imitation, according to poets and those knowledgeable in poetry, its appreciation, and differentiation, involves a poet beginning with a particular meaning and a specific style. The style is a type of structure and its method, and another poet may adopt that style, bringing it into their own poetry, and this is likened to someone cutting a sandal from a piece of leather following the example of one already made, and it is said: 'He imitated its example'" (Al-Jurjani, 1992, pp. 468-469). In this, he defines style as a type of structure and its method, "thus he identifies and limits it. On the other hand, he connects structure and style" (Blouhi, 2004, p. 02).

The term *al-usloob* was also frequently used by Hazm al-Qartajani in his book *Minhaj al-Bulaghā' wa Siraj al-Adab* (The Method of Eloquence and the Lamp of Scholars). In this work, he dedicated the final section of the four parts to the study of style, successfully utilizing the term *al-usloob* and recognizing its value and impact on the audience.

In his book, Hazm al-Qartajani addresses many issues related to *al-usloob* (style), stating: "Since poetic purposes involve a broad range of meanings and intentions, and these meanings have particular aspects in which they arise, and issues that they encompass, such as the aspect of describing the beloved, the aspect of describing imagination, the aspect of describing ruins, the aspect of describing the day of separation, and similar matters in the purpose of love poetry, these meanings are acquired by the soul through persistent attention to these aspects, transitioning from one to another, and through the consistency in meanings, a form and structure emerge known as style. Thus, the relationship between style and meaning is similar to that between structure and words. This is because style arises from the continuity in describing one aspect of the purpose of speech, and the consistency in shifting from one description to another. It is like structure in words, which is a form of continuity in words and expressions, and the arrangement that occurs in transitioning from one to another, relying on various forms of arrangement and methods of ordering. Therefore, style is a structure arising from the meaningful compositions, and structure is a form arising from the linguistic compositions" (al-Qartajani, 1986, pp. 363-364). He connects style with eloquence and rhetoric, the nature of literary genres, and the semantic aspects of compositions.

The term *al-usloob* became firmly established in its nominal form in *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzur and in *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun. In these sources, some of its linguistic and technical characteristics were defined. In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun states: "We will mention here the behavior of humans according to those who specialize in this craft and what they mean by it. Know that it refers to the model in which structures are produced or the mold in which they are formed. It does not pertain to the speech in terms of conveying the original meaning, which is the function of syntax, nor in terms of conveying the complete meaning through the qualities of the structures, which is the function of eloquence and clarity, nor in terms of meter, as used by the Arabs, which is the function of prosody."

In this context, Ibn Khaldun argues that these three sciences (syntax, eloquence, and prosody) are separate from the poetic craft itself. Instead, they relate to a mental image of structured compositions as they apply to a specific arrangement. This image is derived from the elements and individuals of the compositions, and the mind forms it as a mold or model. The mind then selects the correct structures in Arabic, based on grammar and rhetoric, and arranges them as a builder fits materials into a mold or a weaver arranges threads in a loom. This mold expands as the fitting compositions align with the intended meaning of speech, resulting in the correct form in accordance with the Arabic tongue's linguistic ability (Ibn Khaldun, 1981, pp. 570-571).

The concept of style, as presented by Ibn Khaldun, is both precise and appropriate for his time. He defines it as structured compositions embedded within textual frameworks that align with the goals of linguistic craftsmanship. For Ibn Khaldun, style is a mental faculty that reflects a person's inner nature and psychological character. He regarded it as a way of speaking, a unique manner of expression specific to each author within a particular literary genre. The variety of styles, according to him, arises from differences in context, subject matter, and the speaker's competence and artistry.

Hence, the Arabs viewed style from the perspective of its outward form or the imagined form it might take. They considered it a form of expression, a method, a model, or a mold. This view is especially evident in the works of figures like Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani and Ibn Khaldun. From this perspective, style can be understood as: "the unique approach an author takes with language, or the manner of performance, or the method of expression the writer adopts to convey what is within their mind or to communicate with others using linguistic expressions. It is the way of writing or constructing, or the method of selecting and arranging words to convey meanings with the intention to clarify and influence" (Hegazi, 2005, p. 126).

Moreover, the classical poets and critics did not adopt a single definition of style. They sometimes linked it to the semantic aspect of compositions, at other times to the nature of literary genres, and yet at other times to eloquence and rhetoric. Their discussions reveal a focus on harmony as a key principle in evaluating style, touching on concepts like parallelism, assonance, and rhyme, as well as the alignment of words with meanings, and the phonetic and semantic suitability of words in their arrangement. The concept of harmony is a significant aesthetic criterion for style, often involving measures related to words, meanings, structures, and the overall framework of the text (Al-Adous, 2007, p. 24). Additionally, they explored stylistic deviations and shifts, such as the use of inversion, omission, repetition, and other forms of variation in context.

This demonstrates that Arab heritage recognized the stylistic phenomenon and studied it within the framework of rhetoric. Upon further reflection, it becomes clear that Arabic rhetorical studies were essentially a form of stylistic analysis. This

was due to the fact that linguistic studies and the field of linguistics preceded rhetoric in Arab intellectual tradition (Ayashi, 1990, p. 30).

The concept of style can be considered as a linguistic event because language is its tool of expression, psychological because its effect is the ultimate goal, and social because the presence of others is essential for its existence. Thus, the term "style" preceded the emergence of the term "stylistics." However, the introduction of the term "stylistics" did not replace the concept of style; rather, it refined its scope and function within the new term. Stylistics deals with language as if it were the medium through which expression takes shape, akin to how a sculptor shapes marble. Stylistics, in this sense, handles specific forms of expression that have reached a particular level of literary achievement (Ayashi, 2002, p. 93).

The early scholars were keenly aware of the formal and stylistic features of literary discourse, attributing great importance to them. Additionally, the theory of "nathm" (structure) proposed by Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani has had a profound influence on Western scholars. We find many modern critics referring to a stylistic image in classical theory, often stating: "This theory finds its counterpart in the foundations of modern stylistic theory" (Al-Jawad, 1982, p. 64).

Stylistics and rhetoric can be seen as two sides of the same coin, focusing on meaning, understanding context, interpretation, and uncovering its hidden beauty. While modern stylistics is characterized by its precision in meanings related to language and expression, it is distinguished by its artistic subtleties, aiming to understand the depths of the human psyche, its preoccupations, and emotions.

In truth, rhetoric is the art of clarifying language, beautifying form, and explaining meanings through various styles that have gradually evolved. Thus, one can conclude that modern stylistics is simply the rhetoric of the past.

#### **4.2. In the West**

Charles Bally, in his works *Summary of Style* (1905) and *French Stylistics* (1909), defines stylistics as the science that studies expressive forms in the language of the work (the text), based on their influential content. In other words, it is the study of actions and expressive practices in language organized to demonstrate their effect on the content, specifically in terms of expressing emotional acts through language and observing the impact of linguistic actions on sensory feelings (Rais, 2003, pp. 30-33).

Stylistics has been defined as a theory of style, based on Buffon's assertion that "style is the man himself." It starts from the idea of departing from the linguistic norm, and its focus is the study of style through linguistic and rhetorical deviations in literary production. Karl Koeper, in his book *Introduction to Stylistics*, adds that a specific term for stylistics can only be established through three historical phases, represented by three generations of prominent stylisticians. These phases span from the era of Bally and (Spitzer), to the generation of (Riffaterre) and (Jakobson), and then to (Larlet Thomas).

During these phases, stylistics underwent complex discussions and significant efforts within Western critical studies. Critics at the time focused on solidifying this discipline, determining its directions in order to liberate literary analysis methods from normative and subjective judgments. They sought to establish methodologies for analyzing literary discourse in a scientific and objective manner, starting from careful descriptive studies.

### **5. Stylistics and Structuralism**

The convergence of systems with linguistic expressions and the elements that constitute discourse makes stylistics a key area of interest for scholars in the field of structuralist criticism. Structuralists provided a specific view of structure, considering it the focal point around which the text revolves. "It is a system of transformations with its own rules, being a system in contrast to the distinguishing characteristics of its elements" (Dib, 1979, p. 7). Based on this definition, we can say that for structuralists, the text is built upon three foundational principles: totality, transformation, and organization.

Totality refers to relationships, transformation is a series of changes, and organization deals with structures and the preservation of their units. The text is a self-organized structure, coherent in its composition, aimed at achieving the intended semantic dimensions within this reality: "The idea of system has formed in its womb all the laws that regulate the trajectories of beings and things in their greater circles" (Al-Masdi, 2008, p. 51).

Thus, stylistics and structuralism share a common reliance on the domain of system and structure, governed by self-imposed laws that are based on analysis and the uncovering of dynamic links that lead the text to various interpretive avenues. This is known as the textuality of creativity. "Literature, in the view of stylistics, is poetic language, but in the view of structuralism, it is linguistic poetry" (Maslouh, 2002, p. 28).

What is meant by this is that structuralism emerges from linguistic ideas to lead the study of literature and its purpose, linking the text through an extended network of interconnected relationships. On the other hand, stylistics draws from its procedural elements to achieve the goal set by this structure. In stylistics, the subject is a condition for achieving the poetic goal, while structuralism focuses on the linguistic fabric to attain totality, meaning, and the surface level of the text. It is evident from this that the features of structuralism are part of the objectives of stylistics.

Literature is a form of creative communication, and once its creation process is complete and its structure is finished, the relationship between it and its creator (the author) is severed. What remains is the connection between the message and the recipient's self, which is affirmed by Riffaterre through the "death of the author" once the text has fulfilled its message and form.

Roman Jakobson asserts that the foundation of text construction is the process of alignment between the speaker's self and the reader, without neglecting the text's function, which signifies its poetic nature and artistic beauty.

These modern approaches rely on analysis and the reassembling of literary texts in a way that reveals the hidden secrets of their rhetorical depth, their transcendental purposes, and the objectives the writer intends to convey to the reader. This process also demonstrates the functional validity of the text in establishing the contours of existence and reinforcing the rationality embedded in addressing various challenges the text engages with.

Thus, it can be confidently stated that stylistics is an evolved form of rhetoric, which aligns with and intensifies the modern textual narrative amidst the surrounding challenges.

## **6. Conclusion**

- Stylistics is a science closely connected to cognitive reality, beginning with language and extending to its creative aspects. Its nature evolves alongside the surrounding environment, unlike rhetoric, which is based on the fixed principles of the text and the foundations of creativity within it.
- Stylistics relies on the study of linguistic phenomena, examining the properties of language and uncovering its symbolic meanings.
- While linguistics is the science that studies language through its educational tendencies and normative judgments, stylistics focuses on the language of literary creativity, through a scientific and objective approach.
- Structure is the central axis around which the text revolves, while stylistics represents the set of rules governing the rotation and structure within this realm.
- The field of poeticism in structuralism concerns the degree of compatibility between words and their syntactic structure, while stylistic poeticism is concerned with the degree of alignment of the entire text with the purpose of this structure.
- What is needed today in such studies are the practical aspects that balance the text between the standards of rhetoric, the fixed principles of stylistics, and the objectives of structuralism (viewing the text rhetorically, stylistically, and structurally).

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